

WRITE ON 11

December '79 Issue



STORIES: John Gowling, Kevin Otoo, Alan Butterworth.

ARTICLES: Ada Mason, Elizabeth Spencer, Doris Sydenham, The Gatehouse,

POEMS: Nick Ripley, Joe Smythe, Freda Higson, Norman Sherwood, Phil Boyd, Joan Batchelor, Richard Goldfizar, Dave Prestbury, Celia Roberts, Gordon Jackson.

PLUS: Work by adult literacy students.

25p

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Introduction

And now for something completely different, well not too similar anyhow.....WRITE ON 11. As usual there are poems and stories by some of our old favourites, and an article, this time written by the Gatehouse Adult Literacy Project. And then, of course, there is a crop of writers new to the pages of Write On, two from the Rochdale Writers' Group, three from Commonword, and two, Doris Sydenham and Freda Higson looking back at life as they remember it used to be.

Since the last Write On, there have been a number of developments which promise to produce even more writing by working people. Following the establishment of the Rochdale Writers Group, a second group has been started at Balderstone Community School. By all accounts the idea has caught on like wildfire and the group is now thinking of its own publication.

For a long time we have been conscious of the fact that not many women take part in the workshop at Bloom Street, perhaps because it is in the City centre, perhaps because it is mainly men. In order to provide a setting in which women can meet and discuss their writing, a womens' group, Home Truths, has been formed in Stretford.

Over the past year many people have felt that at a time of growing social uncertainty there is a need to establish their roots in the past through autobiography and historical accounts. To develop this strain of writing, a history workshop has been formed at the Abraham Moss Centre in Cheetham Hill.

For more information, turn to the inside back cover, or phone 061-236-2773.

Thanks To: North West Arts, Manchester Cultural Services and the Gulbenkian Foundation for their financial assistance.

Nick Ripley, Greg Monks and Elizabeth Spencer for their illustrations.

MARC for the use of their duplicators.

Living On't Moors

I think a person has to be born and bred on't moors to really feel a part of them. To be able to say, "I love the moors. Here I intend to live, and here I hope to die." Such people like the Brontes and Ammon Wrigley become as one with their environment. Their roots are on't moors.

Many people these days are uprooted. In most places they easily become acclimatised. But the moorlands are difficult, you take them as you find them. No compromise!

There are times when I almost hate these Pennine foothills, especially when standing in my doorway waiting for the bus, with the wind and rain lashing at me as though they owed me a personal grudge. It is at such times when I say to myself, "Woman you had rocks in your head when you decided to live here." When the mist covers the hills, nothing to be seen, everywhere dark and damp, then it is depressing. But real moorland folk do not think so. The mysterious mist and battering winds - which roar down my chimney - are part of moorland fascination. Eventually the winds and rain cease. Along comes a sunny day and the deceitful moors smile, charming even me.

Gradually, very gradually I am becoming fond of these moorlands, and the grey stone cottages and farms. Becoming quite proud of saying, "Oh, I live over the tops." Or when I go south - to Manchester - I say, "I live on the moors." Quite impressed some people look.

There are compensations living up on't moors, such as a house with open views of the changing hills. The beautiful sky and cloud formations, the winter sunsets over Holcombe Tower. One can watch the shadows move across the hills. Watch sheep and cows grazing; smell the grass when cutting time comes, and manure being spread. A variety of smells and scenes in season. Still pastoral in spite of mechanisation, stinking trucks and juggernauts.

One morning I was sitting in the kitchen drinking my breakfast coffee, also gazing through the window. Not being over bright at that time of day, for a few seconds I didn't quite believe my eyes. But, yes, there it was from a bygone age, slowly, silently floating over the moor tops. A Balloon! a lovely morning surprise. Another remembered morning I got out of bed, drew my curtains on a bright shining day. Got dressed and went downstairs into the living room, drew the curtains. Over Holcombe Hill there was just one smallish black cloud, and across the cloud a perfect rainbow.

That morning I felt specially privileged. A good omen, I thought, and just my rainbow - only me to see it, a picture in my window.

Living on't moors sure does have compensations.

ada mason

Ada Mason lives in the Edenfield area and is a member of the Rochdale Writers' Group. In the past she has worked in a cotton mill and as a cook. She has been a committed Trades Unionist since the age of 15.

Great Uncle Joe

My Great Uncle Joe built this dry stone wall. He was one of the best dry-stone wallers in the West Riding of Yorkshire, and one of the best boozers too; he could down a pint at one long gulp. I suppose it was thirsty work dry-stone walling.

Uncle Joe built quite a lot of the dry-stone walls around Halifax and Huddersfield, some bordering valley fields, others up on the windy tops. He not only built walls, he often helped to build farm-steads and out-buildings, and mighty proud of this work he was. It fair broke his heart when one of these farm-steads was drowned under the waters of a new reservoir.

"Some of my best work under t'watter!" wailed Uncle Joe. I don't think he would have felt so bad if they had drowned the farm-stead under a vast flood of best bitter. Great Uncle Joe loved ale, perhaps even better than his stone walling. He always had a gallon or so by him when on a walling job. He claimed the more ale he drank, the stronger and straighter he made his walls, though the way some of them twist and turn over the moor makes me wonder about that. Uncle Joe's walls are strong, right enough, but not all of them are straight.

A few months back, I saw some blokes with a car thieving stones from one of Uncle Joe's walls. I was real upset and told them so. They said they wanted the stones for a rockery and didn't realise the wall belonged to anybody. And that's what makes me mad! Some people think that dry-stone walls are no use, and the stones just free for the taking. They don't understand most of these walls are so old they've become part of Nature, things of beauty, like the granite rocks and the wild heather. Besides all that, they help the hill-farmers keep his flocks of sheep together.

Some of these stone walls are so old, I think you could call them Ancient monuments, like castles and cathedrales. And if there were dry-stone walls hundreds of years ago there must have been dry-stone wallers, like my Uncle Joe. His ancestors, (and mine too come to think of it,) building their strong, sturdy stone walls, and swilling down good, strong, home-brewed ale to keep their strength up.

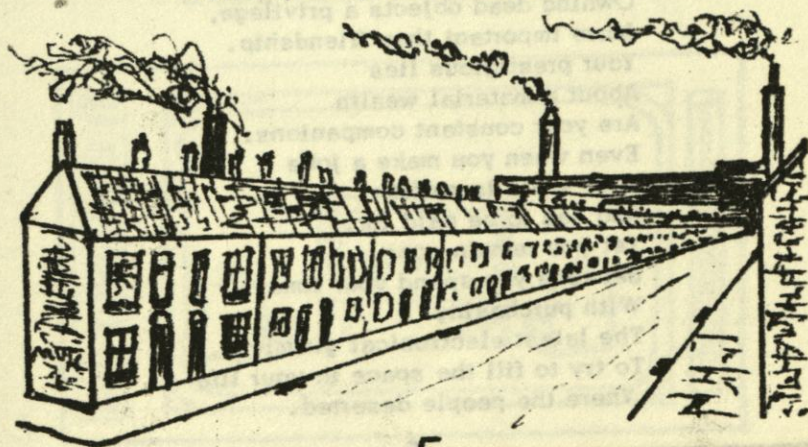
So now you can see why my Great Uncle Joe got his dry-stone walling, and beer drinking talents from.

elizabeth spencer

Elizabeth Spencer is a member of the Rochdale Writers' Group. Leaving school at 14, she has worked as a kennel maid at a greyhound track, a photographic assistant, commercial artist and nursing assistant. She writes, sketches and paints, and, unwillingly, does housework.

Clayton

Shadows hang permanently in the doorways,
Hard laboured dirt from factories
Grows onto the brickwork
Like some black suffocating ivy.
Lace curtains and fresh paint
All fail to hide the lines of worry
On the faces that peer
From windows.
Even the pride
The weather tortured houses
Had once managed to inbreed
Has withered,
As did the councillors' promises
Now hate and an unknown fear
Infect the already sore wound
Of the young, as their violent pleas
Are ignored.
And as the old stand talking on doorsteps,
The hope is apparent
In their nervous glances,
That the grey clouds that lie overhead
Will only bring the usual rain.



Sixteen

I examine myself
With searching looks.
Probe my body gently,
With fingers,
Finding physical evidence
Of my transformation
To maturity.
But as my hand
Moves across my face,
Bone stops the fingers
Feeling in my mind
The proof that I need,
To convince myself
That I am sixteen.

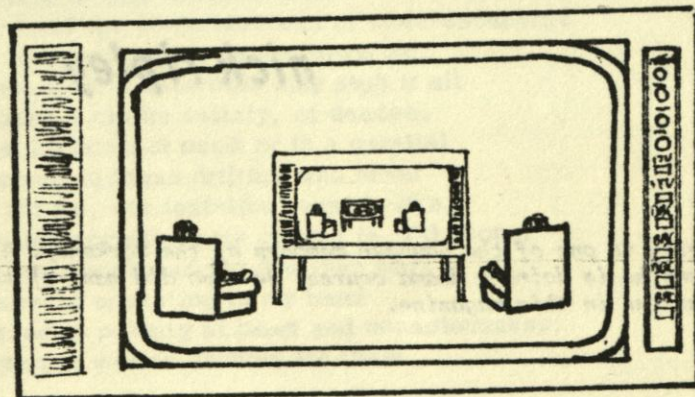
Gold Plated Ideas

You regard
Owning dead objects a privilege,
More important than friendship.
Your prestigious lies
About a material wealth
Are your constant companions.
Even when you make a joke
Your smile is selfish
And has to be paid for.
Yet you remain poor
Because you spend your time
With purchasing
The latest electronical gimmicks,
To try to fill the space in your life
Where the people deserted.

The Television

A world revolving around coffee,
Warmth of the fire,
And comfort of the chairs.
Permanent boundaries are made
By the eldest,
So as to obtain the best position
To watch, passively
The wonderment and company
The television holds.

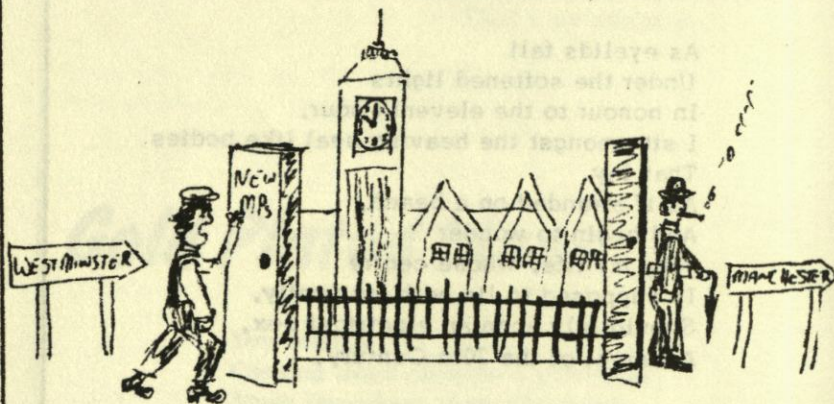
As eyelids fall
Under the softened lights
In honour to the eleventh hour,
I sit amongst the heaving seal like bodies
That lay
As if stranded on a beach,
And begin to wonder
Why my life, whose centre
Is supposed to lie with my family,
Should rely upon an electrical box,
A marvel of the 20th Century.



Sewer Worker

What would you be like
If you could
Walk the corridors of power?

Somewhat like a sewer worker
I imagine,
Trying to clear all the shit away
But finally
Being overcome by the smell.



nick ripley

Nick Ripley is one of the younger members of the workshop. At the moment he is doing a drama course. He also did many of the illustrations in this magazine.

Helen Gives Nooky

HELEN GIVES NOOKY in paint a foot high
on a wall in Ancoats, there's fame for Helen,
how about the painter, had Helen given
him the elbow, was it a girl whose boy
is Helen's nooky now? I'd like
to think, it's a lover's celebration,
HELEN GIVES NOOKY in a paint of praise
such as poets in old time sonnets gave
to all their Helens for all their nooky,
or better still, Helen herself,
paint spattered fingers glowing in the dark:
HELEN GIVES NOOKY for all who knew the girl
at the wilder walls of warmest Ancoats,
this poem's another advert, no charge for Helen.

Where World People

Who are these people in the drifting city
leaf-like in that wraith of mist
dead-ends the consciousness of town-escapers?
Lost blossoms or the never flowering,
and all other similarities may sigh it all
for these a cliché satisfy, or deaden.
I must be dumb or numb or in a parallel
existence to these drifting who never
drift for me, nor leaf-like, wraith-like,
haunt the corners of my coming in. I'd sooner
be a lamp-post marking dog than mark
the streets appearing in my hand
a pissed in poverty of heart and consciousness,
any man or woman anchors me there.

Right Of Way

George Stephenson was here, tough old Geordie with his P-way walking legs agog again: the first station of the world's first passenger railway, Liverpool Road to Liverpool's Edge Hill, 1830. 1830. The hundredth and fiftieth anniversary celebrations have been announced, mostly to do with the Rainhill Trials, which is wise of the Railway Board, I suppose, considering the state of Liverpool Road today, it must be the oldest slum in Manchester. George Stephenson said: you can change the shape of the world sooner than men's minds, and, suffer the nobility, they have the money. George Stephenson's monument is in our consciousness.

joe smythe

Joe Smythe writes prolifically. Apart from the poems in COME AND GET ME, he is just completing a book of poems commemorating the opening of the first passenger line between Manchester and Liverpool, due to be published by the NUR.

COME AND GET ME

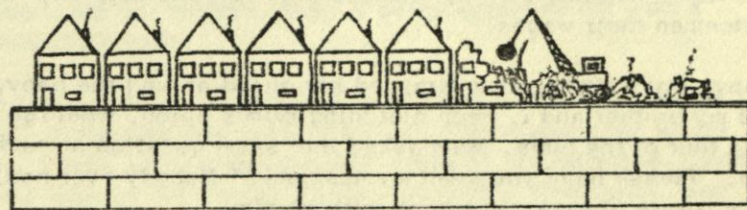


64 Pages of poems. The subjects are mostly Manchester with poems on the World Cup and the Royal Family thrown in for good measure. The history of a big city, its beauties and uglinesses. Childhood and sex. The world is viewed through another pair of working class eyes. Illustrations by Dave MacDonald.

25p from Commonword or Grass Roots.

Ten Little Occupiers

Ten little occupiers standing in a line
'Round came the council, then there were nine.
Nine little occupiers having quite a wait,
Up went a notice, then there were eight.
Eight little occupiers thinking they're in heaven,
One went to Langley, then there were seven.
Seven little occupiers in a pretty fix,
One went to Longsight, then there were six.
Six little occupiers feeling half alive,
One got a re-let and then there were five.
Five little occupiers looking rather sore,
Someone knocked a wall down, then there were four.
Four little occupiers wondering where they'll be
One went to Wythenshawe, then there were three.
Three little occupiers wondering what to do,
One got a rebate, and then there were two.
Two little occupiers wondering where they'd gone,
One got a little flat then there was one.
One little occupier, writing all the time,
Putting all his thoughts down in a kind of rhyme.



norman sherwood

Norman Sherwood works on the railways. He has also written a book about his experiences of army life.

A Way Of Life

A WAY OF LIFE IS THE FIRST TWO CHAPTERS OF AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY DORIS SEDENHAM. IT TRACES HER LIFE FROM CHILDHOOD ONWARDS. IN FUTURE ISSUES WE HOPE TO BRING YOU MORE OF IT.

Beer! That was my earliest recollection. That horrible sweet, sour mixture, combined with the ever present smell of stale tobacco, was, to me, the most hateful smell in the world. Why did it have to be my dad that drank the awful stuff? I used to struggle to get away from him when he sat me, very unsteadily on his knee. "How's my little doll today?" He always called me that. Mum and the rest of the family called me Dolly, but not my dad, "How's my little doll today?" That daily question, and his staggering gait as he came from the pub, were all I ever knew of him, in my early years. I can still feel the shame I felt all those years ago, when the two big policemen arrested him for "Disturbing The Peace". That's what they called it when he sang in his rich, deep voice the songs he used to sing in the trenches to help relieve the hell that he and his comrades knew as "War".

Mum would get the rent book and go to the police station to bail him out. Next morning he would be fined. I thought in my childish reasoning that my dad was only fined to help pay the policemen their wages!

Many, many times, mum wrapped her shawl around the baby, and my brother and I, each clutching mum's apron, would go on a tour of the pubs. Mum asked the same question at each pub, "Please have you seen my husband?" Nobody ever had, because we always came back without him.

A couple of hours later, the rows would begin. Softly at first, mum afraid that the noise would waken us children. Then my dad's voice, slurred with the drink, would get louder, louder, until mum was crying. - Mum cried most nights. I would crouch down on the unlit stairs and weep with her. Too young to know why my mum was crying, but old enough to feel the

suffering she was going through.

It was then I started to walk in my sleep, have nightmares, wet the bed. Yes, I did all of that, and more. I think I must have been the youngest person to have a breakdown!

After that my parents were more careful. I realise now that they both loved me, and each other, but the constant drinking almost ruined their marriage, and my life.....

It was not all bad. It just seemed that way, looking back. If I am to be honest, I must remember the good things too. The lovely long summers, when a crowd of us would leave the slums we knew as homes and walk and walk until we came to green fields. We were always warned not to speak to strangers but the warning was not as important in the days of my childhood as it would be today. We may have been tatty little things, poverty stricken and undernourished, but our childhoods were not haunted by fears that beset today's children. Thank God we were allowed to enjoy our freedom, without having to keep looking out for the "Bad Men"!

How many of today's children know the exquisite joy of sitting in the roadway and bursting those lovely big bubbles of pitch that came up between the cobblestones? It was worth the telling off we got from our parents, the ordeal of having margarine rubbed into our fingers, then it being scrubbed off with a scrubbing brush!

Eventually of course, we had to go back to those homes of ours, wondering how many mice and cockroaches we would find. There were compensations again in the mornings. Going to the door to get our jug filled with thick, fresh milk, and then being allowed to give the crust that we had saved from the night before to the milkman's horse. That horse knew just which house to stop at. He would come onto the pavement and wait, wouldn't budge until he got his tit-bit. Horse sense I suppose you could call it!

All good things have to come to an end, and that goes for long hot summers too. We only appreciate what we have when

we find we can no longer have it. That goes for freedom too.. So the great day came for me to go to school. I was terrified, but then, I was terrified of every new event in my life. I was, and still am, afraid of change, afraid of the unknown. So off I went to school with my eldest brother. He had never liked school. Being two years older than me, he had more experience. Yet I took to it right away. Loved it, but it was not to last. Due to "nerves" I had to be kept at home until such time arrived when I would be able to cope. That was not to be until nearly two years later. Once again I settled in nicely. That too lasted for almost two years, then I came unstuck again.

This time I finished up in our hospital that specialised in burns and scalds. My mum was not feeling too well one morning, so I thought I would show her what a clever girl I was by making the morning tea. Instead, I poured boiling water over my kid brother and myself! Mum was given the third degree, what was I doing to get so severely scalded! Poor Mum, a born loser if ever there was one!

I will not dwell on the agony I suffered, suffice to say I will never be careless with boiling water again as long as I live. One moment of carelessness taught me a very valuable lesson. My younger brother was not as fortunate as I. He had to have treatment for months, after I was cured.

I always seemed to be a bad influence on John. He was the fifth child of nine that mum had. One day, not being at school - as usual - I was looking through the window at the horse and van that was parked outside the sweet shop facing my home when I saw John, who was only a toddler at the time, come out of the shop eating his chocolate. He came under the head of the motionless horse just as a motor car - rare in our street at that time - came round the corner. I watched fascinated, as John toddled straight in front of it. I didn't say a word until the wheels had passed over his little body. Then I cried out "Mum, Johnny has been knocked down." My dad, drunk as usual, staggered out, rolling his shirt sleeves up as he went and shouting "I'll kill him." Nobody took any notice of him. The driver was too concerned about my brother. He put him in his car and took him to the nearest hospital. He

was a good man, sorry about the accident, sorry for my mum. So he called everyday with fruit and money to pay for anything Johnny needed. Johnny, incidentally, had the honour of being the first person in our family to travel in a car!

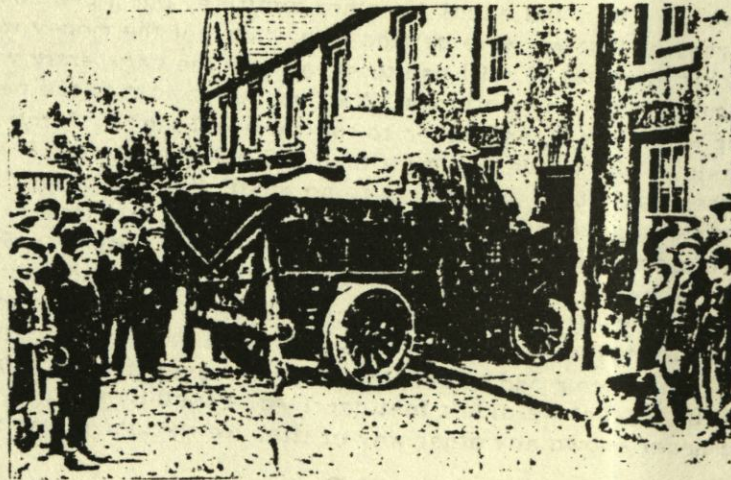
It was about that time that the family discovered that I was "different". Although still a child, I started to have premonitions. Not that we knew that there was such a word. It was much later that it was labelled as such. Now and then, I would come out with the remark that there was trouble. My mother got so she dreaded me saying it. She learned from experience that it meant the police were coming to say my dad was in the station again!

Our new house was a big improvement on the one I had been born in. It was big! This had two bedrooms, gaslight in every room, and best of all a backyard all of our own! No longer did we have to queue with another family, to use the outside lavatory. This one was ours alone. Luxury indeed! Another luxury was the fact that I did not have to sleep in the same room as my mum, dad, and the other kids. No, my eldest brother and I were allowed to share the back bedrooms. What's more, we had a bed each! No other furniture, but a bed each. Oh yes, at last we were getting rich. Not that the money was all that plentiful. I still had to sneak into the back entry with my mum on Monday mornings. Wait our turn to get in the pawn shop - Uncle's - then listen to the same old theme. "Sorry Missis, I can't give you more than two bob for this lot." Mother would beg, plead, but to no avail. She never got the better of him. Every Friday we would go again, this time to get the clothes out. We would only wear our best coats on a Sunday, and we were warned what would happen if we got any dirt on them. It meant Uncle would refuse to take them back the following week, and then the rent would have to be missed. It may seem odd to people who have never lived in those conditions that we didn't feel deprived. Possibly because we had never known any other way of life, we thought it was nor-

mal for the working class to live, nay, exist in that manner. After all if you have never tasted caviare, then bread and dripping goes down very well! Dripping, that's something we were never short of. My father worked at the wholesale market, cutting whole carcasses of meat and lamb, so we did very well for meat. So did the neighbours! Mother felt it wasn't right for us to eat meat almost every day, when there were others who could never afford to buy it. Mother didn't stop at meat. If anyone needed a penny for the gas, and mum only had a penny in her purse, she would give that last penny away. That is how my mum was. She was silly - but I would not have had her any different. She was a very humble person. If the meek inherit the earth, I would like to think that she would be one that would receive her reward. You will come to know why if I finish this account of my life.

doris sydenham

Having spent most of her life raising a large family, Doris now has the time to write poetry, and this, the first part of her life story. It was originally written as a record for her children.



Sunday Clothes

We had a Dad that liked to drink,
that was the trouble I should think.
With seven hungry mouths to feed
we always seemed to be in need.
We rarely had enough to eat,
wore other shoes upon our feet;
wore other peoples' cast-off clothes -
how we managed no-one knows.
Some of the things were hardly worn
and always seemed to be in pawn.
On a Monday, before school,
to take them in would be the rule.
On a Friday night, I would be sent
repay the cash that had been lent.
Can't wear those clothes out in the rain,
on Monday they'll be in again.

Sew and Sew

As a family we were poor
the wolf was scratching at the door.
So I had to leave my learning -
for some money to be earning.
I found a job at just eight bob -
for fifty hours a week.
Eightpence to spend was all I got,
but that to me was quite a lot.
Machining was to be my trade
and by piecework I'd be paid.
If a needle I did break
a penny from my wage they'd take.
So I'd try to - if I could -
to work with one which was no good.
Treadle, treadle all the day,
to do no work would mean no pay.
I could have changed my situation
if I'd had an education.

I Have Lived

I've lived a Taste of Honey
and Love on the Dole;
wouldn't have to be an actress
to have played a leading role.
I've seen women at the pawn-shop
their faces tired and worn;
men standing at the corner,
dejected and forlorn.
I've seen little children
playing outside in the street -
they run along the pavement
no shoes upon their feet.
I've seen old men in the gutters
putting fag-ends in a tin,
their trousers torn and tattered
their coats so worn and thin.

Ah, yes, I've lived A Taste of Honey,
and Love on the Dole:
wouldn't have to be an actress -
it's written on my soul.

freda higson

Freda writes "I have recently retired from what I considered a rat race, for the work I had to do was not what I would have liked to have done given the opportunity. So I thought maybe I could recoup some of my losses in life by writing, which started me on poems about my earlier years and life in general.

Mad Johnny

They took the least line of resistance. Seeking out the weakest link in the chain and subjecting it to pressure. She was that link. And she was fragile enough to yield under the pressure. They used methods of fear and intimidation. And although they used violence, this violence was considered to be negligible and so therefore permissible. They needed a signed statement if they were to have any chance of convicting Johnny. And she was the only person capable of supplying them with one. The fact that they themselves had written the statement did not unduly concern them. It was what they wanted and once they had obtained what they wanted, they discarded her onto the street again. And her loneliness and her pain were something they chose not to see.

She moved along the street easily. Lamplight reflected in her hair. Heels tapping lightly on the broken paving stones beneath her feet.

"Carrie."

She did not hear her name called at first so did not stop but continued on her way. Carefree. Happy within herself.

It came again. More loudly this time. "Carrie." The green mini van pulled onto the kerb. The driver climbing from his seat and coming to stand beside her. "Vice squad," he told her. "We're going for a ride." And that was all he said before taking her by the arm and roughly manoeuvring her into the passenger seat of the van.

They drove in silence. Through the dark and deserted streets. Drove that way for what seemed to be several minutes but which she knew to be much less.

In time they arrived at their first destination. Not the police station however, but the car park behind the football ground.

A sign read: Turnstiles F & G. Adults five shillings, children two shillings.

Fear moved within her.

He leaned towards her but did not speak. Clutching the soft flesh of her leg above the knee, causing her to shrink

into the furthest corner of the seat and to begin fumbling desperately for the release catch of the door.

His hand tightened warningly, painfully, and she became still. "That's better," he told her, transferring his hand to her chin before continuing. "I need something from you." And then deceptively, "Just a little something."

The night closed in around her. Her mouth became dry and her throat constricted. She longed to speak but could not. Words would not form themselves into sounds. Her heart pounded and breathing itself became something difficult.

And then she saw the contraceptive in his fingers and fear completely overwhelmed her so that she screamed at him. "Why! Why!" And in a sudden panic lunged at his face with her nails.

But he had been prepared for this and calmly, deliberately he struck her a stunning blow with the heel of his hand, high on the head. Above the hair line where it would not show.

Afterwards she only vaguely remembered being charged and the contraceptive and her money being taken from her handbag and both being confiscated. She had no recollection at all of the statement she signed and which was produced in court claiming that Johnny had lived off her immoral earnings for twelve months. And her own appearance in court the following morning and her ten pounds fine were more of a dream than a memory.

She remembered always, however, her feeling of desolation when she had returned to the flat and learned that they had taken Johnny in the night. She remembered it always. Except for those times when the wine or the drugs brought oblivion.



They broke him in the end. But they had always known that they would and somehow the breaking meant nothing. Not a victory. Not really even an accomplishment. It was just something that they had decided needed to be done. And after it had been done, they drove it from their minds and forgot their guilt. "Just another job," or, "The black bastard's better off behind bars," they said. And in their own way they had almost believed it.

They had broken him and forgotten about him. Passed him through the courts and the law machine. Through the long hours in the dock and all the degradation - until the silent prison claimed him and he was lost.



They left the new brick and glass building of the Crown Court. Left it behind them, his mother and younger brother, and made their way across the paved pedestrian square before it. Glad in their different ways that the trial was over. The wind stood up and walked beside them. Through the city.

"Johnny diddun do nothing, mam."

"Shush, I know."

Bits of paper round her feet and ankles.

"Johnny diddun....."

"I know," she said again.

The wind moved the clouds and made the cold sun shine down on them. Together they walked in silence. Hand in hand down the long grey streets. Moving between the people and the tall cold buildings. Thinking of different things.

She counted the days into weeks and months. He counted the cracks between the paving stones. There were so many!

So many that you lost count and had to begin again and you kept wondering if you ever really would know just how many of them there were or if they never ended but just went on and on for ever.

If you tread on a nick you'll marry a brick.

They said if you behave son, you'll be out in two years.

The clouds were black now and angry looking. The wind became restless and ran in and out of the bus shelter where they now stood, stinging her legs through the cheap nylons she wore. She buttoned her coat up to the collar. A thin blue coat that couldn't keep the cold out and if one looked closely enough at the hem, big black stitches showed where it had been taken up.

"Upstairs, Mami! Let's go upstairs!"

Slowly she followed him up and walked down the empty upper deck to the front so that he could hold the rail and drive.

The big red bus stammered and squealed before gliding out into the traffic.

"The park gates please."

He gave her change of a two shilling piece. Dirty fingernails. Broken.

"Looks like rain," he said, not even looking out of the window at the sky. A fat man in a greasy uniform, shiny at the cuffs and pocket flaps. His hat balanced precariously on the back of his head.

"Yes," she said.

Back along the bus and down to the long seat next to the platform. It would have been someone to talk to, he thought. And took a crumpled cigarette stump from behind his ear. The buildings looked smaller, dirtier, more plentiful. Huddled together side by side and back to back. Smoke makes the sky black and there were rats in the cellars. A maze of little streets and patchwork houses. A whole section of the city going to ruin. In decay. You could feel the dust in your throat on a warm, dry day, feel it in your eyes. You could almost taste the stink of rotting people.

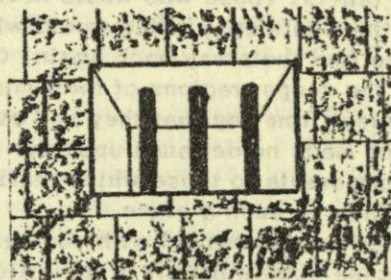
They said the rats ate a Paki's baby half to death.

The thunder growled and the lightning flashed. Bright and blue. Rain swept the city clean. He held his mother's hand

and stamped through the shallow puddles making black spots appear on her nylons. She didn't seem to care and he didn't notice that she was crying with the rain in her face and the wind in her eyes.

Johnny they didn't have to take you.

Johnny.....



They hadn't known when they had locked out his day that shadows would creep into his mind or that dreams would make his eyes blind to the dreams of reality. And even if they had known, would they have dared to change the order of things.

They made him strip and pass his clothes piece by piece through the gap in the side of the open-fronted cubicle in which he stood and, when he was naked turn around and raise each foot in turn to ensure that he was not concealing anything between his toes. Then he was given a towel and told to take a shower.

He moved as if in a dream. Oblivious to the water's warmth and the muted droning of the prison warder's voice from beyond the shower room. His actions unconscious. Automatic. Deliberate and slow. Already resigned to the weeks and months of meaninglessness that stretched ahead of him.

The prison had absorbed him. As it had absorbed thousands and thousands before him. Some struggling. Others passively allowing themselves to be controlled by a word or gesture from another. Incapable of challenging the hold which the prison sought to place over them.

Finding that their self belief and confidence had been stripped from them along with their clothes and possessions

they would close their minds in a reflex protective action against the harshness and the hurt and enter into a state of shock and non-awareness. Until, the period of vulnerability having passed, most would gradually return to something approaching their former selves. Would slowly make their way back to a strange but no longer terrifying environment.

But there were also others. Those who would never completely re-emerge from their catalepsy. Who would withdraw too deeply to be able to find their way back again. Or who would find that within the deeper regions of their minds there existed a freedom different from any that they had ever known before. A freedom which made no demands upon the individual. At least no demands comparable to those which reality could and would place upon them in such a place.

After he had showered he was issued with coarse grey clothing and a pillow case containing all of the articles that he would need and told to check its contents against the list on the blackboard at the far end of the reception room.

When he had done this he took his place alongside the others at the tables provided. He spoke to no one and neither did they attempt to speak to him - respecting his silence and understanding his need for solitude.

He thought of many things and yet somehow contrived to think of nothing in particular. Sitting there staring blankly into emptiness. Time had no real significance. Passing unnoticed. Unmeasured despite the clock on the wall.

Eventually however they were told to stand and collect a bed roll of blankets and a chamber pot each before being shepherded into prison proper.

Here, there were four wings built to a starfish pattern. Each tentacle radiating from a round central body. Each wing consisting of four landings with wire safety netting strung across the lowest level.

They were brought to the centre circle with its large hexagonal grating blackened and polished and made to stand in a semicircle around it. Their bedrolls at their feet.

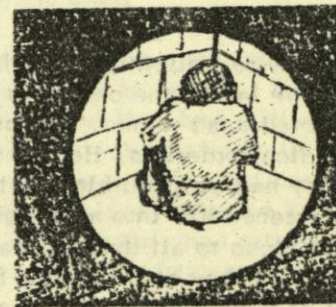
Here at the heart of the prison there was a strange tranquillity. Almost a cathedral-like atmosphere, created by the high domed ceiling and the dim recesses only faintly illuminated by the candlelight effect of the old fashioned gas lamps which hung upon the walls.

A few of the prisoners began to talk quietly among themselves, heads leaning together and - hearing their whispers - he momentarily came out of himself into an awareness of the prison and its uniformity.

His eyes followed the cell doors along each landing. Painted pale blue. Brass handled. Every door with its peephole and two large bolts. Every cell with the occupants card at eye level giving details of age, sentence, religion and any special notes concerning diet. Every landing with its catwalks and metal rails.

And as he saw these things and understood their implications, he let his mind drift back again. Along all of the cell doors and the landings and the rails and into the centre circle with its heavy metal grating and the new prisoners each being lead to different cells in different wings. And still his mind drifted back, back beyond the prisoners and the prison. Beyond the world of time and place. And finally beyond himself.

Until he was locked in his cell and there was nothing again.



They called him Mad Johnny, now. Johnny because that had been his name for as long as anyone could remember - and Mad because since his release from the prison and the hospital there was really no other way to describe him. But no one feared his madness. No one feared the violence that his body was capable of. Even after Winston had pushed him from the cafe and threatened him with a knife causing Johnny to butt him in the face and knock him almost unconscious - still no one feared his madness. And that was as things

should have been because Johnny was not a violent man. Was not someone who needed to be feared.

The sun threw shadows upon the wall. High above his head dust motes floated silver bright in the shafts of sunlight.

He rose from the floor of the derelict cinema in which he slept and made his way into the alley at the rear to urinate.

Weak sunlight bathed him and he laughed aloud and delighted that the damp patch he had made upon the wall should resemble a running horse because today he too would run - as he often did. Run through the empty streets and along the parkway. Around the park itself and then back into the quiet streets deserted except for the odd person making their way to work.

But as he ran his happiness slowly evaporated. Deep and dark thoughts came to trouble him. Images of long ago. Faces that he had forgotten appearing like ghosts from the past. Insistent. Haunting. Forcing him to reluctantly acknowledge that he had known another life and with this involuntary admission came other images. And the pain which he had so long kept submerged.

- They had come into the cell silently. After his anger had spent itself and he lay on the cell floor bleeding from a self inflicted head wound. Two prison officers and two medical orderlies. He had offered no resistance as they had stripped him of his clothes and shoes and fastened him into a straight-jacket. He had been oblivious to all that had happened to and around him. Then they had lead him from amongst the debris of broken furniture and glass that littered the floor and had taken him to the hospital wing where he had been placed in a padded cell. -

His feet beat the pavement rhythmically as he ran effortlessly through the early morning city. Sound reached him. Traffic and birdsong. But his brain did not interpret these noises. On he ran. A flood of thoughts filling his head. Hurting. Hurting in the heart of him. Seeing little. Recognising even less. And still he ran.

- He had wept and become incontinent. Cowering in the corner of his cell. Unable to move his arms. Knowing only fear. Fear of things that he did not understand. Screaming in his confusion. Yet no one had come. Screaming until he had whimpered. And still no one had come. -

Thoughts, images, pictures tumbled into his mind. A speeded up still-movie projector focussed on the borderline of delirium. Sweat sprang from his forehead and rolled down into his eyes. Blurring his vision.

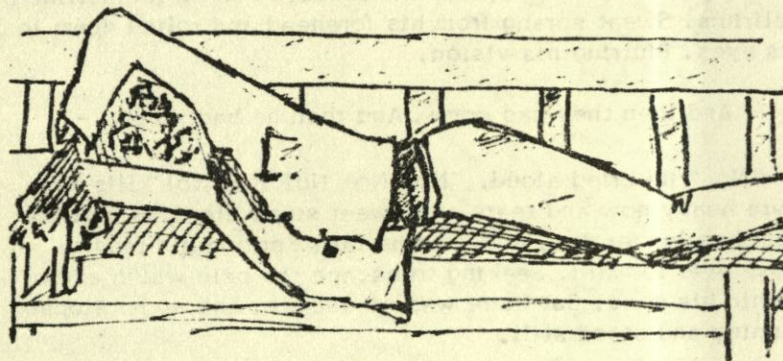
- And then they had come. And then he had slept. -

"No," he cried aloud, "No! No! No! No! No!" His legs were heavy now and tears and sweat stung his eyes until he could no longer see. And still he ran. Forcing his legs to move ever forward. Seeking to escape the pain which exploded within his head. But there was no escape. And so he stopped running and stood still.

- They had asked him questions. Questions which he had been unable to answer. Sometimes had never heard even. But they had still asked them. Until eventually he had withdrawn into silence and had not heard at all. When that had happened they had sent him to a place where he had been safe and happy. And then they had returned him to the world. And he had become frightened again. -

Pain and confusion filled his mind to overflowing. His thoughts were no longer coherent. No longer tolerable. Past and present were inextricably woven together in strange and terrifying patterns from which he sought desperately to escape. But he was already without the strength of will and personality required to effect such an escape and so, in an alarmingly short space of time, the suffering which his brain was unable to handle or to understand reduced his body also to ineffectiveness and immobility and he sank onto the grass verge between the four lanes of early morning traffic.

Later they were gentle with him. Not truly understanding his anguish or its cause but recognising and responding to another's need. And so, draped in a red blanket, they guided him into another phase of his life. One which has to know no end.



Kevin Otoo

Kevin Otoo has written a lot of poems and a short story due to be published by the Hulme Writers' Group of which he is also a member. MAD JOHNNY is based upon somebody he has known.

The Stray

Stray he was and aptly named
And he our hearts soon won,
For he decided to adopt us...
We were as good as anyone.

A dirty muddy heap of rags,
Yet, revealed by a soapy flood,
Silken waves of black and tan,
Underneath the filth and mud.

Our own Bob was a working dog,
Who resented this intruder,
His furlous welcome to this Stray
Could scarcely have been ruder...

Now Stray could be a crawler,
Always beneath our feet,
Grinning with abject humlilty
For whatever there was to eat.

Ponies were a menace, starved and wild,
Savagely chasing the most unwary...
Sheep ravaged everything, scattering bins,
Nights were broken by sounds most scarey.

How jealously was Stray on guard
All night and through the day,
With alert eyes and keen ears aquiver
For the foolhardy to venture his way.

Once lovers had occupied the space,
Nestled, "twixt our house and the next,
Their loving hearts near stopped as one
As Stray proved he was very vexed...

Soon, too, the morning birdsong
Was exchanged for cries of pain,
The milkman, the baker, the candlestick maker
Ran the morning gauntlet in vain...

Crashes, yells and chaos now
Filled the birth of each new day...
Ponties leapt gates and sheep stampeded,
While our Bob, indoors, hated Stray.

Oh, what a courageous sight it was,
To see a wild pony in full flight,
And teeth in tail, waving behind...
A black and tan flag of might.

It ended one dreadful day,
When Stray had tasted a kill,
And not one lamb was safe at all
From the killer on the hill...

Buy It?

He stood there, bluffing away his horror,
The ultimate had occurred...
My daughter, with gulfed innocence,
Had invited this local candidate in.

He looked miserably out of place,
Like a diamond in a coal-mine,
His smile hanging on grimly,
His plum-stone stuck in his throat.

So this is what, for many years,
They had promised to improve...
Sideways noting this corporation dump,
The task seemed to overwhelm him.

He dropped bright election posters
Onto the uneven floor boards...
As the cat lovingly caressed
White fur onto his well-cut suit.

He swallowed his uncertainty,
And, with difficulty, forced a beam
Nearly cutting his perspiring face in half.
"Could I count upon your support, madam?"

... I looked at him, so illfitting
In this place I called my home,
Uneasy before my cynical demeanour,
I felt superior... could he buggery!

joan batchelor

Joan Batchelor is Welsh and proud of it. Most of her family is grown up now and she finds lots of time to write stories and poems such as these and those to be found in ON THE WILD SIDE.



On The Wild Side

A collection of poems by
Joan Batchelor
Housewife unextraordinary
lover of words

"Much in here is written for
people who think they dis-
like poetry, who feel it may
be too 'high brow' for the
working class...it's not
you know..it is the working
class....."

The Egoist

Q "Can you help me with these calculations?
I'm no good at maths."

A "No, you never did get past number one."



Harvest

The only thing we pick
round our way
are fights.

Sure it stinks
But I'm putting the manure
On my bank manager's garden.

Celia has been a frequent contributor to Commonword publications. She has been a student, a shop assistant, and a secretary. Many of her poems can be found in COMMONVERSE.

Concorde

He is shouting
In order to drown the sound
of his own inner voice.

There are not
decibels high enough.

Stable

He holds the conversation
Keeping it well-reigned in
Afrald it might bolt
Given its head.

But instead, like a horse
It may only bend its neck
To crop the grass
Growing over his feet.

Family Conflict

He is banging on the wall
Walls of his own insides

Crying to be let out.

His family who love him
Gather in a circle

Crying to be let in.

Celia Monks

Can I Help You Sir?

CUSTOMER Hallo, shop....Is anybody there?
SHOP MANAGER Yes, yes, can I help you?
CUSTOMER Yes please, is this the sporting equipment shop?
SHOP MANAGER That's what it says outside sir.
CUSTOMER Oh goodie.D'yer sell guns and things?
MANAGER Yes sir.
CUSTOMER And bullets?
MANAGER Yes sir, we sell bullets.
CUSTOMER Oh, that's nice.
MANAGER May I point out one thing sir....?One requires a Firearms Licence to purchase items of this nature.
CUSTOMER Oh dear... But what about hydrogen bombs, does one need a Firearms Licence to purchase hydrogen bombs?
MANAGER Hydrogen bombs...ha...ha...ha...I shouldn't imagine so sir.
CUSTOMER Oh good...well I'll have one...by the way, can I use my Access Card?
MANAGER You can use your Access card sir... but... ha, unfortunately we haven't got a hydrogen bomb.
CUSTOMER Not even a small one... say a fifty megaton one.
MANAGER Sorry.
CUSTOMER Oh dear - never mind - listen - I'll have a V2 rocket complete with war-head.
MANAGER Sorry sir, we're right out of those.
CUSTOMER What about a nice nerve gas bomb, capable of destroying human life over a seven mile radius.
MANAGER It's not your day, is it sir, the last one went this morning.
CUSTOMER Pity.
MANAGER Look... how about a Polaris submarine complete with four nuclear missiles.

34

CUSTOMER

Are you trying to be funny? How would I get that down the street?

MANAGER

Of course, I wasn't thinking.

CUSTOMER

That's alright, but just watch it.

MANAGER

Yes, sorry sir, look... I know this is none of my business - but - what exactly do you want this for?

CUSTOMER

Ladybirds.

MANAGER

What?

CUSTOMER

Ladybirds (shouting)

MANAGER

Ladybirds?

CUSTOMER

Can you suggest anything?

MANAGER

Well, sir, just a minute...Ah...what about this.

CUSTOMER

What is it?

MANAGER

A spud gun.

CUSTOMER

What?

MANAGER

A spud gun sir...it fires bits of potatoes.

CUSTOMER

Do you need a licence?

MANAGER

(whispering) I think we can arrange it without a licence sir.

CUSTOMER

But are they alright for ladybirds?

MANAGER

Er...yes, sir...it says here...especially for ladybirds.

CUSTOMER

Right, I'll have one.

MANAGER

Oh jolly good... there we are... one anti-ladybird spud gun. That'll be 24p.

CUSTOMER

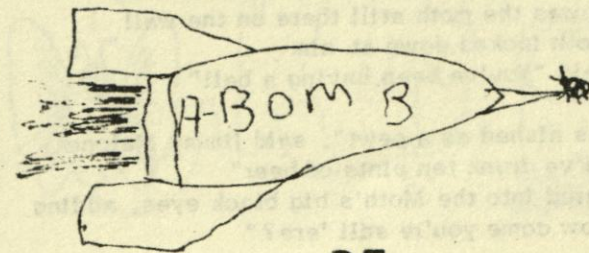
Thank you very much. I hope it works - otherwise I'll have to get a fifty megaton hydrogen bomb - or a V2 rocket.

MANAGER

I'm sure it'll work sir - goodbye.

CUSTOMER

Yes, thank you.... goodbye.



35

The Moth and Jimmy Malone

Jimmy Malone, he washed and shaved
Cos to the pub he was paying a call
He came out of the bathroom all smelly and clean
Then he noticed something strange on the wall

It was a moth.

It was all orange with big black eyes
And it stood out on the anaglypta quite clear
Jimmy said "Hello Moth - I'm off to the pub
for a beer".

The moth just did nothing in reply -
like moths do.

So Jimmy said "See yer"
And he shot off to the pub with zest
He had ten pints and talked a lot
Like you do - to get things off your chest

When he came back he was drunk
And he fell all the way up the stairs
He came to a halt on the landing
And thought about saying his prayers

Cos he was face to face with the skirting board!

But when he looked up, guess what he saw
Ey, it was the moth still there on the wall
The moth looked down at him
And said "You've been having a ball"

"I'm as nished as a pewt", said Jimmy Malone
"Cos I've drunk ten pints of beer"
He stared into the Moth's big black eyes, adding
"An' 'ow come you're still 'ere?"

"Well we only live a few days at best", said the Moth
"And it's cold outside and it's dark
So I've come in here where it's warm and light
I got drenched last night in the park".

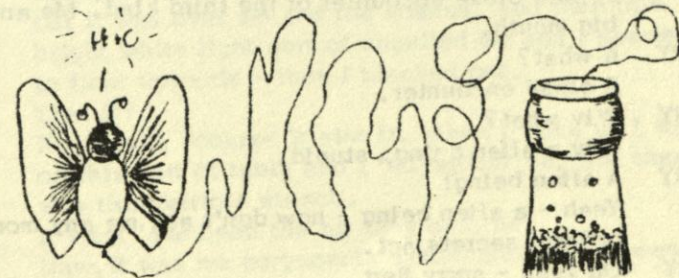
"By all means", said Jimmy Malone
"You can shtay as wong as you lont
You're shertainly a meautiful both,
Is there anything else that you want?"

"I need nought, but good conversation
Would help pass the odd hour of the night
I could tell you of moths, you could tell me of man
That is if you're not too tight"

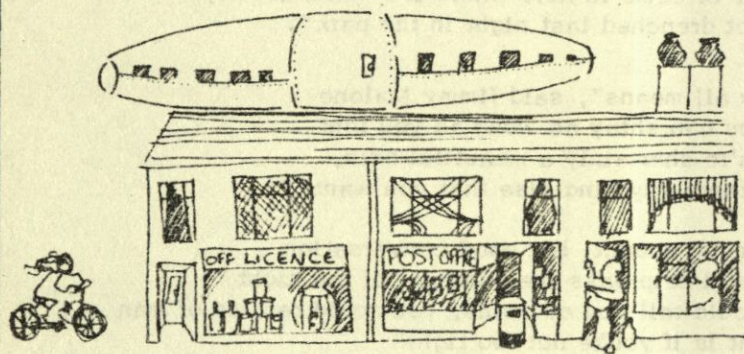
So they talked and they talked
Of men and machines, politics and various things
And of lady moths, hedgerows and spiders
And red admirals with gaily coloured wings

But after two hours of talking like this
Jimmy's eyelids got heavy, like lead
He said "Good night" to the Moth
And the Moth just nodded his head

But when Jimmy woke in the morning
The Moth was on the floor by his side
And Jimmy knew the moth was dead
And Jimmy Malone - he cried.



Close Encounters



HARRY Oh, I see we're blessed wiv your company today
BERT Yeah, well...
HARRY Well what?
BERT What?
HARRY Well where was you?
BERT What do you want to know for?
HARRY Well I do ave a right, don't I? After all, you know Thursday's always the day for cleaning the bollers, and we usually do it between us. So where was you?
BERT Can't tell you.
HARRY Why not? I'll tell you why not - cos you was skiving that's what.
BERT Not so, 'Arry, but don't ask me, please don't ask me where I was yesterday, please 'Arry, don't ask.
HARRY Yeah - alright.
BERT I 'ad a close encounter of the third kind. Me and my big mouth.
HARRY A what?
BERT A close encounter.
HARRY Wiv what?
BERT Wiv a allen being, stupid.
HARRY A allen being!
BERT Yeah - a allen being - now don't ask me any more - official secrets act.
HARRY Oh yeah - sorry Bert.
BERT Can I trust you 'Arry?

HARRY Yeah, but I don't want to get you into trouble Bert.
BERT Well yeah - actually we could be incarcerated for spreading fear and panic.
HARRY Yeah - fear and panic.
BERT But I'll tell you what I'll do, if I impart what I know will you solemnly swear not to repeat it to a soul.
HARRY Course Bert.
BERT Cross your heart and hope to die.
HARRY Cross me 'eart and 'ope to die, Bert.
BERT That's alright then, cos if you don't you might just be atomised wiv laser beams and your particles spread all over the universe.
HARRY I don't want my particles spread over the universe.
BERT Then they'll probably kill you.
HARRY That's not very desirable, Bert.
BERT No. Anyway, I'd just got on me bike, yesteday morning, when all of a sudden I thought...
HARRY You thought of that boiler that needed cleaning.
BERT No, I thought I saw something out of the corner of me eye.
HARRY Was it a horrendous fat green monster with tentacles and bloodshot eyes, ready to render you incapable wiv its rancid breath?
BERT Naw, it was the wife wiv me gorgonzola sandwiches. Anyway, suddenly my dear wife looks up and says "Oh dearest, whatever is that hovering over the off licence What? I says, and when I looked up - there it was - a cigar shaped object.
HARRY I bet you was frightened Bert.
BERT Yeah, I was a bit. Anyway this thing moved across till it was over me and the missus, and then this bright white light sort of engulfed me and I seemed to float upwards - then I blacked out.
HARRY That it?
BERT No stupid, 'course it aint it. When I woke up I was on this sort of table and I 'ad nuffink on, and there was this terrible stench.
HARRY It must 'ave been the air they breathe.
BERT Naw, it was me gorgonzola sandwiches. They were being analysed on another table.

HARRY What about the wife Bert.
BERT Oh, her, she was on a third table.
HARRY Did she 'ave nothing on?
BERT Well she 'ad 'ad nuffink on but they'd covered 'er up again cos the sight of 'er body made two allens sick. You see, where they come from they 'ave nuffink like 'er, they were sort of unprepared so they 'ad to go off and be sick.
HARRY Bad as that is she?
BERT Well it doesn't make me sick, but ' course I'm used to it. Anyway this like alien chief comes over, after his mate had finished probing about me person. And he starts communicating wiv me - not wiv his mouth though.
HARRY What did he use Bert? PsychicThought waves what transmitted his advanced communicating system into something more understood by your base human Interlect. Hey Bert?
BERT Hey, you know about these things, don't you?
HARRY And what did he say?
BERT He said, 'cor mate is that your missus?
HARRY Interested in your missus was he then?
BERT No, he was more Interested in me bike. Thought it, was a marvel of Earth Technology. Course, where they come from they don't have bikes.
HARRY I bet they'll have them now.
BERT Yeah, but they'll 'ave to redesign 'em.
HARRY How's that Bert?
BERT Well them allens see, they don't 'ave a bum.
HARRY No bum?
BERT No, it's brought about by centuries of queuing up. Yeah, do a lot of standing about them allens. See this chief alien said to me "What's this then?" Meaning the saddle on me bike, and I said, "That's where you put yer bum", and he said "Not much use to me - see - cos I aint got a bum".
HARRY What do they 'ave there then, Bert?
BERT Their 'eads.
HARRY It's to be 'oped they don't 'ave to use one of our loos Bert - cos they'd drown if they pulled the chain.

BERT Yeah well, that's one of their problems.
HARRY How do they - er - mate, Bert?
BERT They don't, 'Arry, well not like wiv any touching, they do it by psychic remote suggestion. He asked me 'ow we did it and when I told him, he looked at my missus and said, "Blimey, you must be joking". Made him very sympathetic towards me. He said he'd show me how to do it by remote control.
HARRY How did you get back Bert?
BERT Well we chatted for a few hours, then he said he had to be going and the next fing I remember I was back on Earth suffering from shock, an I 'ad to go down to the pub to recover.
HARRY What 'ave you told the personnel officer Bert?
BERT Oh 'im, he knows, cos 'e's been vetted by the Home Office. But the official reason why I was off is flu - so you don't say nuffink see.
HARRY Course not Bert - Hey remember last Thursday when you was kidnapped by passion crazed amazons and held captive for seven and a half hours.
BERT Don't remind me 'Arry.
HARRY And the Thursday before when Ron Greenwood begged you to get his team fit for Saturday's game?
BERT Shh...I'm beginning to doubt my confidence in you 'Arry. Hey up - here's the foreman. What job on today 'Arry?
HARRY Cleaning the boilers Bert.
BERT You're joking - didn't you do that yesterday?
HARRY Naw, I was off - got involved in a fracas wiv a Chinese Tong leader down behind the gasworks - finished up down Shanghai - 'elping INTERPOL wiv a drug problem.
BERT You too? Lot of it about 'Arry. Shanghai hey? I'm going there next Thursday - come on, let's get that boiler sorted out.

Vogue

Thank God for Vogue
And people who go to Spain
Who flee the British summers
Avoiding the British rain

Thank the Lord for plastic boats
Which people take to the sea
And those who play golf
And leave the British hills to me

Young Scientist

I wanna be a chemist
Cos I ain't no fool
I wanna mix fings like they do
An' blow up the bleedin' school

Alan Butterworth

Alan Butterworth is a draughtsman and drinker, the author of radio sketches, poems and good times. His work goes down even better after five or six pints at a pub reading.

LIFETIMES

LIFETIMES are a series of seven booklets written by people in Partington, the overspill town outside Manchester. The authors are all people who for one reason or another refused to accept the non-community in which they found themselves and tried to do something about it.

In the LIFETIMES booklets they pool their experiences, from widely scattered childhoods to the present day. They talk first to each other, but in doing so, they have a lot to say about things that matter to all of us.

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"...wonderful work, some funny, some sad, but all well written and to the point." TGWU RECORD

"The pieces vary from the average to the utterly refreshing and excellent."

Fleas

I'd just got in from walking up Corporation Street to Market Street to buy Wesley these white shoes, £2 in Saxone's sale. Earlier today I'd been home and pinched one of my Dad's vests and one of his shirts. Wesley had just got this job as a kitchen porter in a night club in Manchester where they employ black staff and entertainers but keep a colour bar on the front door and on membership. I can't mention the name since they'd only deny this, then try to sue me.

So I walked under the railway approaches to Victoria Station and up Redbank to the concrete balconies of Irkdale House. It's a bedsit flat, Wesley is the tenant. It's one big room with an open fire and a sleeping corner in which we've got an iron cot which the Salvation Army gave us. Me and Wesley sleep on the bed. John Leydon, from Salford, who's a porter at Lewis's, sleeps on the settee; and Jimmy from Edinburgh, who does nothing but cadge and break meters, sleeps in the easy chair. Wesley bumped into Jimmy when the latter had gotten off the London bus, drunk on somebody's life savings. I'm from Brooks Bar, Old Trafford; and Wesley is from Clarendon, Jamaica. Yeah... Jimmy broke the meter of the old man upstairs who then had no electric, got all depressed over it, and gave his flat up and went to sleep in the Night Shelter. We gave Jimmy hell about that. So he broke ours too. Mind you, I remember when me and Wesley kidded Jimmy that we were having a communal food budget and he gave us seven pound out of his giro and we went and blew it all downtown. Mind you, he was always eating our food and spending all his money on drink.

I first met Wesley in the New York gay pub. He had this shabby coat on. I thought he was from Soweto. I've never seen black people so poor off as in clips of South Africa. Yeah... or maybe Manchester.

So here I was, getting back home, these were built in the nineteen thirties and are being demolished soon. Half the

block is burnt out into a shell anyway. As well as the big room we've got a hallway, kitchen and bathroom. We tried to clean the windows once... our first glimpse of the railway sidings, the boneyard, the multi-storey flats on Rochdale Road; and to the West, the huge metal and stone city. At night, the tramps sleep in the railway carriages below. You can hear them disturb the alsatian in the boneyard.

Yeah, you're still in the 1970s. When I'd just got the kettle on the stove and Wesley got out of bed and clumped around in these size-eleven white shoes till he found his underpants and put my Dad's vest on. He decided to stay up now and get dressed. We had egg and chips for tea. We survive from one giro to the next on egg and chips. And watched Granada Reports on the box. Our TV is an old Vistonhtre with a slot meter. But Jimmy soon cut that out, so now we don't pay a thing.

Anyway, after the pubs had shut, John Leydon lets himself in with this lad who's got no place to stay. This lad's about 18 years old and dressed like a tramp... a genuine tramp. He'd picked him up in Snack Times, an all-night cafe off Piccadilly. I knew John Leydon never took a wash but this lad was too much even for him. After the late night movie, me and Wesley got into bed, me wearing a jumper cos it gets cold. I always end up taking it off. And Jimmy came in effing and blinding and pressing the buttons on the telly and asking if anyone was for a game of cards, and calling Wesley a black this and a black that, and turning the bloody light on. And Wesley telling him to go fry himself. When John Leydon had laid down this bed of blankets in front of the fire for him and this boy who I'd come to call Flasher because of his grey tramp's coat. Jimmy was so pleased. He'd got the settee for once. And John Leydon and this lad did nothing, just went to sleep.

In the morning John Leydon comes over to the bed and he's dressed for work and he whispers something in my ear, and I say "Why should I do that?" So anyway, I take Flasher into the kitchen and tell him to drop his kecks, which he does. And the young lad's legs are all covered in sores with insects crawling in them and blood and fluid running out. And I have to

tell him he won't reach twenty one if he doesn't come to the hospital with me this very morning. So he tells me he sleeps rough and there's nowhere to wash and he could have caught this in one of the Night Shelters and besides, now he's infested, the hospital won't have him and the Salvation Army keep making him go back to his step-mum. He says that he's been left home six months, and anyway a flat in Hulme is no home.

He leaves the flat at nine o'clock with John Leydon, and Jimmy leaves with them cos he's got to sign on. Flasher refuses to let me take him to the infirmary. I go back to bed ranting and raving at Wesley's bare back, and me going on about the state of Flasher's legs. Till Wesley turns round and puts his hand over my mouth then pulls back the blankets and I'm bloody freezing. And he looks in horror and makes a grab at my throat and shouts out: "A FLEA, A FLEA, QUICK LOOK FOR THE FEMALE, THEY TRAVEL IN PAIRS, QUICK OR SHE'LL LAY EGGS." There's me, my naked body glaring out the balcony widow for all in Rochdale Road flats to see. After ten minutes we find the other flea in the blankets.

I go up Cheetham Hill Road and spend one-fifty in the pharmacy. I buy two fat cannisters of flea powder. Then we stand in the hallway with the front door open. And I rush in the living room and Wesley pulls the door shut after me and me pumping away at this cannister, my head in a towel. Clouds of white flea powder all over the bedding, the curtains, the chairs and carpets. White clouds of flea powder. Then rush out of the door and slam it behind me and get my face out of the damn towel and breathe again. Then read the cannister, which says to repeat again after four hours. What a wasted day.

And we lean there against the verandah outside the front door, watching the traffic and trains on Redbank, and waiting for the big room to defumigate itself. When who comes out of the stairs-room but Flasher with his coat full of fleas. He's telling us how John Leydon said he could stay with us till the pair of them get a flat off the council up Miles Platting. And Wesley hits the balcony above. There's terrible shouting and swearing about Flasher going to be thrown off the balcony unless he gets down them stairs pretty quick and never comes back

again.

Flasher's fighting a losing battle and he eventually turns his back and scrapes off along the deck to the stair-room. I lean over the balcony and see him coming out of the bottom of the flats, then traipse all down Redbank to under the railway viaducts, then in shadow turn right, past the Women's Hostel, back to the garbage cans of the city centre and the big restaurants up Corporation Street.

Yeah... Wesley is going for a job tonight.

But what about Flasher?

john gowling



John Gowling was born in Moss Side, raised in Reddish and has since lived in Moss Side, Merseyside, and now in a Council maisonette in Beavick. He has worked in a nightclub, hospital, housing department and on the buses. He is 27.

Marriage Bliss

SUNDAY MORNING

"Let's make love, dear bride,"
"I can't! The children are playing outside."
"Come on love, let's have a nibble,"
"Ooh, do stop that Earnest,
You're making me giggle."
"Aw! Come on, let's have a screw."
"Sorry love, I've all my ironing to do."
I sigh!
Is there any use being married to you?

SUNDAY MIDDAY

"Come on Earnest, blow me a kiss."
"Aw! Come on Sue, I'm going out on the piss."
"Earnest, dearest Earnest oh do
give me a love."
"Heavens above, I'll be late
for the pub."
I sigh!
Is there any use being married to you?

SUNDAY EVENING

"Earnest wake up, you drunken lout!"
You're supposed to be taking me out."
"Ooh do stop that shaking
my head's bloody aching.
What time is it Sue?"
"Seven thirty two,
and it's getting late!
The sitter is coming at eight!"

AT THE LOCAL (LATER THAT EVENING)

Sixteen pints and a brandy
says Earnest "I'm feeling quite randy."
"Oooh," says Sue, with a slight groan,
"Hic' just wait until we get home."

LATER STILL THAT EVENING

Back home and it's a race for the loo
staggering Earnest up the stairs
trailing Sue.
Then all of a sudden before his eyes
stands Sue all naked, right up to her
thighs.
He tears off his clothing quite speedily.
Groans Sue, "Take me! Ravish me!"
"I'm doing my best."
Ouch! It's caught in my vest.
Help me Sue,
I'm in a bit of a stew."
She tears off his vest
with so much zest,
and it's off to the bedroom
Like Tarzan and Jane
and they eventually have it -
again and again
and again and again and
and again and again.....

Grandad Breaks Wind

My grandad would sit in the chair
 Belching, rifting, and breaking wind
 He didn't care
 Any more
 He would just sit there
 In his old armchair
 Sucking mints
 Belching, rifting, and breaking wind
 Perhaps
 It was the mints.
 He didn't care
 My grandad
 Why should he
 It was his chair.....

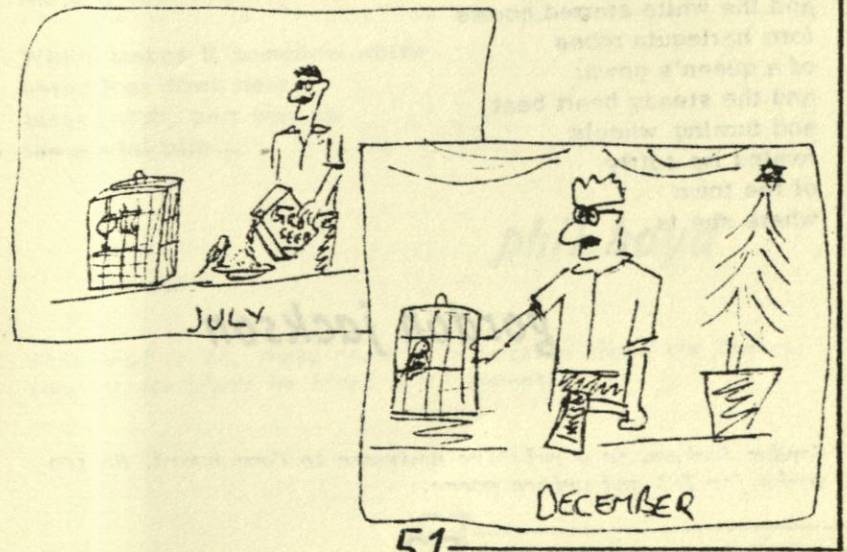
dave prestbury

Dave Prestbury comes from Failswoth. He is in his early 30s and writes poems and songs. He works for ICL Computers.



High Rise Christmas

'ey, Mam,
 'ow's 'e goin' to get down our chimney?
 there's no chmniees in flats.
 What d'you mean he'll come to t' door?
 S'pose 'e goes to t' wrong one
 an' that snotty nosed girl down t' passage
 gets my machine for makin' 'orrible green luminous skulls
 like what I asked 'im for,
 an' I get a doll that wets and sez Mamma
 when you thump it in t' chest?
 D'you think she'll swap it Mam?
 Mam....
 Can I wait up an' see 'im Mam?
 Well
 can I keep one eye open?
 An 'ow's 'e goin' to get round everyone?
 'e'll 'ave to move flippin' quick
 cos, after 'e's bin 'ere,
 'e's got to go to our Eric's in Bradford.
 'ow does 'e do it Mam?



Scene

Orange sun
slides into smokey
industrial oblivion
without even
saying
goodnight.

Home Again

the lights of the town below me
travel lethargically past
as the train weaves its caterpillar way home.
The yellow winking lights
and the white starred homes
form harlequin robes
of a queen's gown:
and the steady heart beat
and turning wheels
remind me softly
of the town
where she is.

gordon jackson

Gordon Jackson is a relative newcomer to Cornwall. He too works for ICI and writes poems.

Crazes

A year ago
the walkways roared
to the sound of skateboard kids
bound on futuristic wheels
to bright tomorrows.

Today I saw the new revival:
An urchin sister
in broke down shoes
with bruise-blue knees
scooting reluctant
from the past

Turkey Lane

It's not so bad up here
as kestrels hover at the brook
for prey. And to the West
the sun sets afire
the charcoal city blocks.

Which makes it somehow worse
being lost down here
insect high, part way up
the social pile.

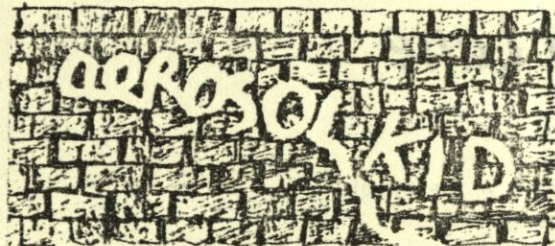
phil boyd

Phil Boyd is 27. These poems were written about the Turkey Lane estate where he lived until recently.

The Aerosol Kid

Rattling his spray can at the entrance to the Subway,
walking over dead pools of paint,
following a trail of white footprints,
he enters a tunnel of hate.

A Machine gun bursts over a crowded wall,
the spray can splutters dead in his hand,
black bullets dribble in the Aerosol mist,
not a single word from the Aerosol Kid,
but the sound of running feet.....



Salt of the Earth

As you bow into the wind,
your arse up against the wall
and your feet well rooted, into the ground;
smile and close your eyes -

A White gloved hand,
from a horse drawn coach,
will wipe the honest sweat from your brow.

To an English Astronomer

The hole in his head keeps burning,
flames leap across chasms of space.
The eccentric Astronomer is watching,
and waiting for God's saving grace.

The English Weather

High Summer,
but the rain falls,
nonchalantly dripping
from an Englishman's head.

Autumn

One chime of a bell
caught by the wind,
and early leaves give chase
to the immutable sound.

Reggae in the Crescent

In the Crescents of Hulme
a slice of Moon,
reflects on broken glass.
While deep from the concrete
the echoes of a Beat,
shake loose the window hoardings.

Sleepless Night

Again and again
the empty beer can rolls,
past Hell and back;
beneath my window all night long.

Even the wild wind then,
is caught between these bars of stone.

richard goldfizar

Richard Goldfizar has been coming to the workshop for about three months now but he is no newcomer to writing poetry. Most of his work is like these, short and to the point.

A Write to Read

THIS IS THE SECOND ARTICLE IN WHICH QUESTIONS OF WHO READS AND WRITES ARE DISCUSSED. IT WAS WRITTEN BY WORKERS OF THE GATEHOUSE PROJECT, AN ORGANISATION BASED IN BLACKLEY WHICH PUBLISHES WORK FOR AND BY LITERACY STUDENTS. LIKE COMMON--WORD, GATEHOUSE IS A MEMBER OF THE FEDERATION OF WORKER WRITERS AND COMMUNITY PUBLISHERS.

"There is no reading problem. There are problem teachers and problem schools. Most people who fail to learn to read are victims of a fiercely competitive system that requires failure. If walking and talking were taught in most schools we might end up with as many mutes and cripples as we now have non-readers." Herbert Kohl.

The Gatehouse Project is part of a larger literacy movement. Literacy in general came out in 1974, when the Government released 2 Million for literacy work and set up in conjunction with the BBC the 'On The Move' programme.

On the surface it looks quite simple. Some adults had not acquired reading and writing skills and now there was the opportunity to spend time and money enabling them to acquire these skills. But it wasn't that simple. For a start there was ignorance among educators and the general public about literacy. This ignorance consisted of assumptions about people who couldn't read and write:

"When I told the woman behind the desk that I couldn't read or write she began to mouth words at me, as if I were deaf or stupid."

"When I explained to him that I'd come for literacy classes because I was illiterate, he gave me a form to fill in."

Students had to fight through this sort of humiliation and maintain their self-confidence and belief in their own worth.

It is no coincidence that many adult literacy students are working class. It is working class children who consistently have their confidence undermined by the school system, who are put in large classes and left to sink or swim. If they sink they've had it. They are immediately labelled as having a low IQ (and who knows what that is anyway?). Their teachers expect very little of them and end up with exactly the results they expected. Surprise, surprise!

Some people have tried to treat reading and writing problems as a science. But the scientific objectivity seems to break down when it comes to class backgrounds. If you're middle-class you'll be labelled dyslexic or word blind. If you're working-class you'll be labelled remedial or backward, and in the staff-room they'll call you thick. The treatment's different too. If you're middle-class you'll be rooted out and tutored, have much time and money spent on you until you've mastered the written word. But if you're working-class you'll struggle in the back row until you give up. All school's taught you is to fail and to dread failure.

For many adults coming forward for literacy tuition the experience was a repeat of the one they had at school. For example, testing in education is one way we are belittled in our attempts to gain knowledge. Testing manages to cut away the real, human, common ground there is between teacher and student. Many literacy students rightly say: "If you need to give me that test to find out I can't read, you're mad."

But the existence of these values and behaviours has meant that adult literacy work is not as straightforward as it might seem at first. Adult literacy workers who were fighting against such ideas met with difficulties. The materials they had to deal with were all child based. For some it was obvious that this wouldn't do. But for others there was no contradiction involved in teaching a forty year old man, who might well be a highly skilled worker, to read using a Janet and John book.

There was a need for texts for adults which were simple for the beginner reader but not simple minded. Texts which ref-

lected the language and thought of adults, spoke to their interests and bridged the gap between the written and the spoken word.

It was from this need that some workers evolved the idea of using students' own writings, which could be taped or dictated, for literacy books. This is how Gatehouse books came about. It has meant that in literacy the students are actually generating their own learning materials. All Gatehouse books are written by students and are put together as books with the help of the project workers.

Another important aspect of the Gatehouse work is organising Writing Workshops with literacy classes and reading clubs throughout Manchester. We aim to encourage people to write, dictate or tape something and to share it with the other people and also to make writing be seen as an essential part of all literacy work. We are trying to find a way out of the child based teaching materials and attitudes. Unfortunately many teachers and students have ideas in their heads about how you teach reading that are based upon how you might teach a five year old. What our workshops try to do is to show that you don't have to be able to spell all the words in the dictionary before getting experiences onto paper. On our first session we throw the whole group, teachers and students, in at the deep end and after a short discussion about writing and what you might be able to write about, we get people writing, taping or dictating. We come back together after about half an hour and read back or recount what everyone has done. People surprise themselves and each other by what they produce and we hope realise that getting ideas onto paper doesn't have to be four work books away. The danger is that the group goes back to where they were before the Gatehouse circus came to town. But we hope not. We go on to help the group put this writing together in a magazine. So in the next two sessions we encourage people to look at what they've done in the light of others reading it. We help lay out the magazine and then offer an optional fourth session where people can come and see and learn how it is printed. We do this at the Manchester Area Resource Centre so that people will be able to learn the skills and go on to produce their own magazines.

It is a way of building up student writing to be used to produce more. But the most important thing is to show people what they can do and that this is an enjoyable way to work on reading and writing. We hope that some people will go on to be interested in outside writing groups.

The project itself is a collective of six. Some of the workers are literacy students and their experience of, and insight into the difficulties of learning to read and write is invaluable. We share the work and skills and we see ourselves not as a publisher or a team of experts but as a community resource. The community for us is literacy students. At the same time we are creating links with other groups in the immediate area to enable them to put their experiences into print.

Since we started in 1978, funded through a Government Job Creation Project, we've published eight books which we distribute by mail-order throughout the country to literacy schemes and libraries. The stimulus for our writing workshops came from the 'Write First Time' writing weekend in 1977 where students and teachers spent a whole weekend talking and writing. At the second of these in 1978 'Let Loose', a book, was produced. As Kevin puts it on page 61 of the book:

"When you take away that block - the fear of mis-spelling - it's like a door being opened. Putting words onto paper and building a picture out of your mind, without the fear of spelling mistakes, this creates a part of your mind that you've never experienced - to write what's in your mind and express feelings and hopes which you wouldn't before. You look at your writing and say: 'I did that?' Everybody's thinking about something. But we can't all write it down. I went round a word like enormous - I would write big. As soon as I stopped bothering I were off."

And Kevin should have the last word:

"Well teachers are prejudiced. That is the problem. Often the way they want you to put it, is the way the upper class in the South of England talk, class prejudice really. Class gets into everything and gets into writing too. Teachers and people in society reckon their way of talking and writing is the best way. Now, I think it's very important for us not to accept that and not to say: "Oh, we're students down here and we're to talk and write like those people up there." It's very important not to change your writing like that. You wouldn't want to change your accent, would you? So you shouldn't want to change your writing for people who are prejudiced."
(Let Loose page 71.)

(Write First Time is a national newspaper of students' writings which comes out quarterly.)

Gatehouse



Having Fun At Finefare

I start at nine
and pull the blinds up.
The supermarket
is quiet and still.
I put a new ticket roll
in my gun,
and I'm ready
to go!

I get the milk from the cooler,
change the numbers on the gun.
Pull the trigger
and shoot the butter
(I'm quite good
at that).

Carole
won't stand for any
messing!
She keeps an eye on
me
all the time.
She's the Supervisor
and strict
but
she always helps us
when we want her.

Last Thursday
the roof caved in
over the chocolate biscuits
and crackers!!
Now -
we're selling broken biscuits
by the ton!

There's a big stand of eggs
in the centre of the display.
The toddlers run up to them
and
skrackle them and throw them
on the floor!

Tarah is Indian.
She has long black hair
and gold ear-rings.

paul wilson

*Paul Wilson is a member of the reading club at Fielden
Park College.*

Salmon Fishing

When I was seven years old I lived in a town called Wiltshaw in Lanarkshire. One day I went fishing with a friend called George and his father. We went to fish in the River Tweed for salmon. It was New Years Day and it was spawning time for the salmon and so it was against the law to fish at that time.

Mr Patterson was fishing with a great big rod made out of a shunter's pole, with a line as thick as a clothes line. The reel was about 6" in diameter. He had four hooks called sneggles, about 3" long. You could see the salmon in the water, as clear as crystal. He cast in across the river and dragged the line towards him. The hooks caught the sides of the salmon.

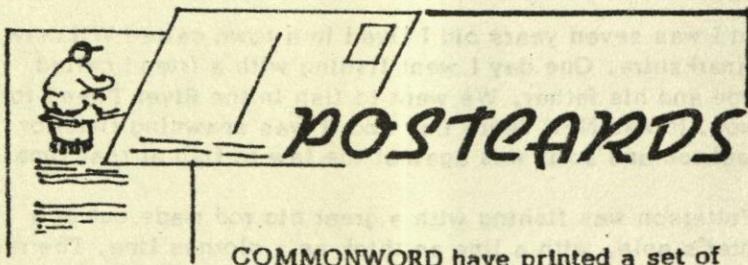
He caught six salmon. One of them weighed 35lbs, the others were smaller. At that time fresh salmon was 3/6d a pound! I was learning to fish and trying to catch young parr and grierling.

Suddenly I saw the water bailey in the distance. After we had caught the fish we planked them (we hid them underneath planks and straw). The water bailey approached us. He said, "That's a big rod you've got. There aren't any grierling big enough for that rod." He must have suspected what we were up to. Mr Patterson said, "I might catch a big fish." The water bailey said, "Tell the boys not to take any parr out under 6½" long." Then he walked on. You see he had a ten mile stretch to cover.

We went home with seven salmon and a basket full of parr of all different sizes wrapped up in oil skins to keep the smell down!

duncan

Duncan is now working on an oil rig in the North Sea. He used to be a member of a reading club at Ducie High School.



COMMONWORD have printed a set of ten postcards. Each carries an illustrated poem written by a member of the Workshop.

There are two by Phil Boyd, four by Joe Smythe (author of, 'Come And Get Me'), three with a Welsh atmosphere by Joan Batchelor, and one evocative of Jamaica by Lynford Sweeney.

5p each or ten for 40p. Available from Grass Roots, Metro Books of Bury, and Commonword offices, 61, Bloom St; Manchester 1. Tel: 061 236 2773.

Meetings

Mondays 7 - 30pm. Commonword Workshop meetings. Everyone is welcome. (See back cover for more information.)

Tuesdays. A new Women's Writers Group is being set up by Wendy Whitfield of Commonword. It will be based at Stretford Library in the childrens room. The first meeting will be held on Tuesday 11th of December at 7 - 15pm. For further details ring Wendy at Commonword.

Tuesdays 7 - 30pm. Rochdale Writers Group meet at the headquarters of Rochdale Voluntary Action, 157 Drake Street. All are welcome to read or just to listen. Contact Ray Mort at Commonword.

Wednesdays 7 - 30pm. Balderstone Writers Workshop is held at Balderstone Community School, Queen Victoria Street, Rochdale. Contact the community tutor or steward, or Ray Mort at Commonword.

Alternate Wednesdays. The Hulme Writers Group meets in Hulme Library. For more details phone Fran Kershner on 226 - 1006.

Commonword is a member of The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers. This is a national co-ordinating body consisting, at present, of some twenty five Worker Writer groups spread around Britain. For more information contact: Mike Kearney, E Floor, Milburn House, Dean Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 1LF Tel: 0632 20719.

WRITE ON is a quarterly magazine produced by the Commonword Writers' Workshop. The writing in it is by working people and reflects the way we see and experience the world. We believe that this is important and that writing has been for far too long a middle-class possession. We are fed up with 'serious' writers, members of a literary elite, writing for and about a privileged few; and with the big publishers who serve up 'literature' for the minority and best selling trash for the majority; and with an educational system that all too often only succeeds in crippling people's ability to enjoy or create their own literature.

We hold regular workshop meetings at which people who have traditionally been discouraged from writing get together to read and discuss their own work. We try to find outlets for this work in public readings and in our own publications. We get out into schools and colleges, working with different groups in the community. The important thing is communication, writing and helping other people to write about the things that matter to them and the majority of people. For the elite, the important thing is usually making money.

Workshop meetings are held every Monday at 7,30. There are people in the office during the day to talk about your writing, arrange readings and give more information about our work.

COMMONWORD WRITERS' WORKSHOP
61, Bloom Street, Manchester. M1 3LY
Tel: 061 - 236 - 2773.